Une Ambiance Diaspora: Continuity and Change in Parisian Maghrebi Imaginaries

SAMUEL SAMI EVERETT

Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge

> North African Judaism has a strange inability to synthesize the three currents that make up its cultural heritage: Hebrew culture and religion, French culture, and Maghrebi-Arab Civilization. It has never managed to refine the latter element; that is, formulate sensitivity towards a coherent group of which it formed a part for so many centuries, and express it in multiple ways.
>
> ———Dominique Schnapper, 2011 (author's translation)

M-Switch is an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) company in which North Africa is a used as a trope of conviviality, which resonates with many of its Maghrebi[1] Jewish and Muslim[2] employees. The company was founded at the end of the 1980s and is located in a three-story building adjacent to le Sentier, a neighborhood situated in the second *arrondissement* of Paris. The Paris conurbation, *le grand Paris*, has the highest demographic density of North African Jews and Muslims in the world outside of Tel Aviv (Cohen and Ifergan 2007: 225). Beginning in the late 1960s, le Sentier became a major hub for the manufacture, distribution, and sales of cloth (*le textile*), which I will refer to here as textiles, specifically those fabrics used to make traditional North African dresses. This hub included a disproportionate number of Maghrebi Jewish entrepreneurs whose employees were Maghrebi *émigrés*, many of them Muslims

(Green 1997: 102). By the early 1990s, as the Parisian ICT start-up boom began, the depots, warehouses, and shops that made up this hub were redeveloped into equipment centers, high-tech smart-offices, and conference rooms, marking a shift in the French economy toward service-provision and new technology (Lasch, Le Roy, and Yami 2007: 63).

James Mlihi, the son of an Algerian Jewish family from Oran whose parents moved to Paris just before his birth in 1961, established one such ICT company called M-Switch. Trained as a telecommunications engineer, James is also a rabbi who leads a congregation that follows the western Algerian variant of the standard Jewish liturgy. Once the company began to develop its services, James invited his friend and associate, the less observant Guy Benchetrit, a former traveling salesman from Oran, to become commercial director. Then, in the early 2000s, Mlihi recruited Laila Chamakh in order to expand into the North African ICT market, which became the company's most lucrative venture. Chamakh is an engineer, born in Casablanca, whose family is closely affiliated with the Tariqat boutichichiya, an eastern Moroccan Sufi order. Unlike M-Switch's other Muslim employees, including Chamakh's friends Moh and Nedjib, support engineers now in their late twenties both of whom were born in France and are of Algerian heritage, Chamakh quickly gained access to all areas of M-Switch.

The main argument of this article is that M-Switch exemplifies important spaces that demonstrate that Jewishness and Muslimness need not exclude one another. Even though what follows is primarily a story about Jews from the Maghreb and their descendants, they hardly exist in a vacuum. Maghrebi Jews have continuously interacted with Maghrebi Muslims, and they have identified with and through one another via dynamic historical interactions in the Maghreb[3] and, after decolonization, in France. Tapping into this, Guy characterizes the atmosphere of the M-

Switch workplace as *une ambiance diaspora*, a descriptor for a shared sense of North African-ness that transcends religious boundaries. *Une ambiance diaspora* at once formulates a postindustrial commercial culture and a site where Maghrebi Jewish-Muslim shared space is negotiated and reproduced. Thus, while North African Jewish-Muslim relations appear to be ever-more-distant in urban France as a result of violent geopolitical tensions, M-Switch demonstrates that such relations continue to exist. But they are precariously poised between ambivalent Maghrebi social imaginaries.[4]

In what follows, I explore the construction of these precarious Maghrebi imaginaries by looking at five central players at M-Switch—James, Guy, Laila, Moh, and Nedjib—who shed light on contemporary commonalities between Maghrebi Muslims and Jews that are usually invisible in the scholarship relating to the experiences of being (or feeling) Jewish or Muslim in Paris today. M-Switch is an environment where these central players work across these religious and generational representations of difference, interacting through key meeting points of common cultural memories, mutual economic dependency, geopolitical conflict, and changing gender and class relations, propelled by an ambiguous desire to recover a variously expressed Maghrebi world. This is not to say that M-Switch can stand in for all Maghrebi Jewish-Muslim relations, but it does provide an ethnographic world that lends itself to "close person-centered" (Strauss 2006: 334) psychological and social portraits that demonstrate the contradictions of Jewish and Muslim Maghrebi imaginaries and their relationship to materiality. The behavior and conversations of these players, with whom I co-constructed my ethnographic reflections, allow us to see the significant weight of ethno-religious representation in their interactions. At times they manage to

overcome this weight by negotiating their individual and collective social, economic, and religious commitments.

This Maghrebi center to Jewish-Muslim relations exists in parallel to the ethnographic findings of Kimberly Arkin concerning Arab/Muslim antipathy among Parisian Jewish students in private Jewish schools (2009; 2014). Many of Arkin's interlocutors live in "geographically peripheral Parisian" neighborhoods (2014: 3). Those who work at M-Switch are older than Arkin's interlocutors, and while not necessarily more middle class, in the main they reside in Paris and not on its periphery. Ages at M-Switch range from the early twenties to the late fifties and therefore cross both generations and the differences between those who immigrated and those who were born in France; Guy and Laila were both born in Algeria and Morocco, while James, Moh, and Nejib were born in France. Yet despite the differences between the people whom Arkin and I write about, I did find evidence of Maghrebi Jewish-Muslim conviviality, albeit sometimes fleeting and often imperfect. That conviviality surpasses the pervasive frame of conflict that concentrates on "Islamic" anti-Semitism (Jikeli 2015) and calls our attention instead to the congenial and close personal contact in the shared Jewish-Muslim Maghrebi space.

Central to Arkin's work is the notion that Jewish high-school students of Maghrebi descent have the particularity of having significantly distanced themselves from Arabness, structured as they are to instead identify primarily as either French through a historical push, often via familial narratives, or Israeli by the contemporary pull of fashion and tech (Arkin 2009). Within a similar timeframe, Paul Gilroy moves beyond the school and presents us with the notion of "conviviality"—a modus operandi for interethnic and interreligious relations that develops locally through contact and encounter, however fleeting, mundane, or symbolic, in an urban context. However,

Gilroy points out that while "routine features of vernacular conviviality" sketch out a potentially more empathetic future, they are also freighted with structural tensions (2004: 153). To help us imagine this, Gilroy juxtaposes the image of the Rastafari and the Conservative politician sipping tea together with the same political party's "stop and search" policy that is twenty-seven times as likely to be applied to a Rastafari than a white Conservative politician (ibid.: 154). Thus conviviality, while embedded in structural tensions, also implicitly challenges the assumptions of those structuring meta-debates around a dying multiculturalism or the reemergence of a prominent ethnocentric national identity.

The zones of Jewish-Muslim Maghrebi complicity and tension within the workplace at M-Switch are articulated at the intersection of this particularity and conviviality. Situated as they are in the postcolonial present, expressions such as Guy's *ambiance diaspora* evade the wistfulness of nostalgia and draw instead on a reimagined "as if" past to negotiate an ethnically plural and potentially convivial present. Rather than naturalizing the violence of French imperial hierarchical relations, in which each racial category had its place, *ambiance diaspora* as a working practice at M-Switch evokes an alternative that is forward-looking. The company's owners and employees draw on fluctuating and selective historical readings of the Maghreb and Jewish situatedness within it and bring into focus an unstable and contradictory Parisian landscape of intergenerational Jewish belonging in relation to Maghrebi imaginaries.

The Maghrebi imaginaries produced by the owners and employees of M-Switch demarcate the changes and continuities of Jewish-Muslim commercial relationships and practices in Paris, which are not immediately apparent from the outside and rarely make the news. The locale of M-Switch and the sociality within it blur the lines between Jews and Muslims of Maghrebi heritage,

reducing to some degree the importance of religion or ethnicity. This should not, however, obscure the tensions that persist within such relations. These include the endurance of both paternalism and socio-economic gaps, which are complicating features of the reinterpreted past. Alongside these gaps are other social mechanisms, for example changing gender norms and growing aspirations to upward mobility in France, which are situated differently in time for Jews and Muslims of Maghrebi heritage. Furthermore, the ubiquitous presence at M-Switch of Israeli engineering creates material connections to political conflicts across the Mediterranean that remain highly charged for many Jewish and Muslim employees.

Following Joëlle Bahloul's relational frame for approaching shared sensibilities toward the Maghreb (1992), this is the ambivalent and yet hopeful story about how Maghrebi Jews and Muslims sometimes work to find common ground over and against a wider French social world. Such work pushes back against recent historical and sociological scholarship focused on French Jewish-Muslim relations and intergenerational French Jewish identity by showing how these are more complex than first meets the eye. I argue that imaginaries of Maghrebi Jewishness and Muslimness are commensurate not because people do not always think of themselves as Muslims and Jews (Katz 2015: 12), but rather because what it means to be Jewish or Muslim and Maghrebi is not always reducible to binaries such as European or Arab, Israel or Palestine, or Judeo-Christian or Islamic. The M-Switch story suggests that shared Maghrebi heritage mitigates against Israel's symbolic preeminence as *the* purveyor of technological and material fashions among North African Jewish descendants in France (Bensimon 1989; Allouche-Benayoun and Bensimon 1999; Tapia 2010; Danan 2014). Perspectives that highlight a redefinition of sharp and conflicting ethno-religious boundaries between Jews and Muslims inspired by the Israel-Pa-

lestine conflict (Amselle 2011; Mandel 2014) often lose sight of this heritage. This is perhaps because conflict has become the relatively uncomplicated hegemonic paradigm through which relations are read, while the complexities of ambivalence and contradiction are often dismissed or relegated to the margins.

I experienced the ambiance of M-Switch between 2002 and 2008 when I was working in the Parisian telecoms industry. I found that I could relate to the people at M-Switch in terms of my own Algerian Jewish heritage. This entrepreneurial period of my life, following my undergraduate studies, was also fed by a desire to discover the world of my grandparents who ran a textile-trading depot in le Sentier during the 1960s. The observations and examples in this article, therefore, draw in part on my time working in the telecoms industry, and in part on reflection and ethnography emerging from research I undertook in the same neighborhood in 2010 as a Ph.D. candidate learning Darija and Judeo-Arabic.[5]

After providing a brief historical background, I will examine practices of North African conviviality, and then turn to the meaning and practice of *ambiance diaspora*. I will conclude by exploring the limits of Maghrebi imaginaries in contemporary Parisian Jewish-Muslim cooperation.

Historical Background

The neighborhood known as le Sentier, where M-Switch is located, has preserved certain urban Maghrebi characteristics. For example, it includes Maghrebi Kosher and Halal outlets that sell couscous and kebab. Similarly, North Africa's large cities have long concentrated Maghrebi Jewish-Muslim interactions, including employment, trade, and commercial cooperation (see Geertz 1973; Goldberg 1989; Gottreich 2007; Levy 2015). Such economic interdependencies were moored by significant historical Jewish involvement in local markets, particularly in the selling

of grain and fruit. North Africa Jews in some respects held a higher-class position than Muslims; thus during the early colonial period Jews tended to receive certain privileges as a "middleman minority," as evidenced by their networks of trade and influence in western Algeria (Schreier 2010: 31). But this certainly was not always or everywhere true in all respects across precolonial and colonial temporalities. In France, this inheritance would partly inform intercommunal urban Jewish and Muslim activism that sought common cause to fight racism in the 1930s (Katz 2015: 109). These political and commercial antecedents were carried through to the textile businesses that flourished in le Sentier in the 1960s. M-Switch, located in this neighborhood, maintains these historically inflected examples of North African interreligious understanding within the telecoms industry. Jewish-Muslim staff and client encounters occur through the local and transnational geographies of M-Switch, physically situated in le Sentier and operating in North Africa. Contacts among staff and the ethno-commercial basis of M-Switch's business model—from distributing telephone cards to providing new technologies to North African telecoms operators—simultaneously perpetuate and alter patterns of Jewish-Muslim relations once found in colonial North Africa.

M-Switch began developing its voice and switch technologies at the end of the 1980s in conjunction with a Paris-based Pakistani telephone card salesman named Khaled, who ran a company called Falcon that commercialized an eponymous telephone card.[6] Dissatisfied with having to outsource the invoicing of the calls made with his cards, known as "voice traffic," Khaled approached James Mlihi to develop the virtual switch technology that would give him access to voice traffic monitoring systems. This in turn enabled him to control the rates at which calls to different destinations were invoiced, a practice known as "switching minutes." For example,

calls to the city of Algiers might cost 20 euro cents per minute, but the calls could be purchased at a lower rate by "switching" to another voice traffic provider. Conversely, when the market for voice traffic to Algiers became more expensive, James's technology would allow Khaled to increase the rate charged on the Falcon cards. Large telecoms providers and national telecom authorities in North Africa (known as *itisaalat*) are often overtaken technologically by large mobile operators, and James, Guy, and Laila's idea of offering them these switch technologies and monitoring/invoicing systems proved to be a commercial master stroke. By providing systems first to Falcon and then to national telecom operators, M-Switch situated itself ever-closer to diasporic communities in Paris and so-called "homeland" locations/destinations like Algiers and Casablanca. Since the 2000s, therefore, M-Switch has underpinned transnational business networks as an intermediary of Israeli technologies while remaining anchored in Maghrebi migrant networks as a company in le Sentier founded by a self-defining North African Jewish entrepreneur.

M-Switch's presence in le Sentier testifies to the economic shift of President Mitterrand's France from a manufacturing to a service economy. Like those Maghrebi Jews born in France who prospered by working with their families in the textiles trade, others envisaged social ascension through technological training and entrepreneurialism.[7] Such trajectories, which involved recycling former textiles spaces, did not erase interreligious Maghrebi commercial legacies, which have been strengthened and weakened at different times by the ambiguity with which the French State has positioned Maghrebi Jewish populations.[8] Indeed, some of the le Sentier-based telecom service industry was founded upon preexisting routes of transaction between France and Africa. Nevertheless, the shift from manufacturing to services or, more pertinent to Maghrebi Jews, from textiles to telecom, indicates Maghrebi Jewish generations born in France are distanc-

ing themselves from North African collective memory in matters of know-how. At the same time, the demand for telecommunications enabled M-Switch to replicate not only Jewish-Muslim trading patterns but also communal migrant understandings and cooperation, for example in the need to communicate frequently with those "back home" (previously via the now-obsolete payphone).

North African Conviviality at M-Switch

A long history of North African Jewish-Muslim employment, trade, and commercial cooperation bled through to the textiles industry, borne out of post-independence Maghrebi immigration to France. ICT, and telecoms in particular, were an organic outgrowth of the textiles industry, for several reasons. First, the telecoms industry demands a particular skillset regarding both commercial knowledge and wholesale trading and retail sales that is also key to marketing textiles. Second, the telecoms industry enabled the recycling of former textiles spaces as a France-born Maghrebi Jewish generation of trained engineers invested their new social capital in a network of textile and fabric shops or workshops. Finally, telecoms continue to associate Maghrebi Jews and their descendants with the experience of being a Maghrebi minority and part of an ethno-commercial business chain, with the contact that entails. M-Switch began as a small business, with four employees at its inception and nineteen when the synergy with Falcon came about in the 1990s. It grew to almost forty employees in the 2000s as the company increased its North African operations. The vast majority of these engaged in both engineering and sales. To my knowledge, every M-Switch employee self-defined as either Muslim or Jewish, but in differing ways. Though there was no prerequisite that they be observant, the majority were.[9] Although French Muslims of Pakistani and Congolese descent have worked at M-Switch, most of its workers are of Algerian, Moroccan, or Tunisian descent.

The ethno-commercial chain from which M-Switch arose and to which it contributes is based on an assortment of power-laden vertical and horizontal interactions, both between M-Switch and its clients and providers, and internally between its directorship and staff. As head of M-Switch, James Mlihi sits at the center of these interactions alongside two of his cousins who are heavily involved in the development of the tech industry and are based in Netanya, Israel. James is dependent on them for cut-rate purchases of equipment and the engineering wherewithal to use it. He established a similar relationship with Khaled as he discovered the telephone card market. Thanks to his pioneering Falcon card, Khaled came to monopolize the telephone card market on the basis of the superior technology James provided. Khaled conceived of and commercialized the systems that enabled his success, but they were operationalized by James and his team of engineers and supporting engineer staff.

With the exception of Guy, who is a self-made businessman, the educational pathways of M-Switch's owners and employees, read in a Parisian context, clearly indicate that the expertise at M-Switch is culturally French. There is perhaps no clearer expression of how French hierarchical values have been internalized than *l'ingénieurie* (engineering), which promotes discipline, rigueur, and pride. James's higher education is in technological research, and he is the only person at M-Switch who holds a Ph.D. His thesis was fully funded by a center of Parisian engineering excellence. His research was, and continues to be, in operations and ICT. Both Guy and Laila immigrated to France. Guy earned a *brevet d'état* (high school certificate) from Oran. After Laila arrived in France, she earned an engineering master's degree from what is considered to be a good, though provincial (northeastern France) *école de commerce*, or private institute of higher education. Among the engineering-support employees at M-Switch from the early 2000s, both

Moh and Nedjib had degrees in telecoms engineering from *la fac* (short for *faculté*: state university) in small cities in southern and central France. This is significant because, though engineering is a highly competitive field of higher education in France, there is a clear hierarchy between these degrees: from doctorate, to master's degree, to *licence* (equivalent to an undergraduate degree). Moreover, there is a difference between going to an *école* (Laila's MA), a privately endowed institute (James's Ph.D.), and a public university (Moh and Nedjib). Additionally, there is an unspoken geographical hierarchy between Paris and *la province* in terms of the value of degrees.

Though less qualified than James, both Guy and Laila were key gatekeepers for the difficult-to-access markets of Algeria and Morocco, respectively. Their crucial advisory roles in business strategy gave them autonomy from James and at times equal status with him within the firm. Meanwhile, Moh and Nedjib, though qualified, had to recognize James's authority foremost, and ultimately also Laila's, since they could not progress in the sector without their patronage. Nedjib would eventually take over from Laila, though only to manage existing business and not to implement strategy for the future. He has a remarkable curriculum vitae full of lengthy quotations of praise from his superiors, indicative perhaps of his reliance on them to advance in the field.

Yet, while the hierarchy of *l'ingénieurie* is in evidence at M-Switch, the promotion of "Maghrebiness" in the workplace subverts this quintessentially French order and disrupts the notion of the ethics of republican education that pervades French political life. The centrality of the Maghreb at M-Switch stems from its founder James, who though born in France self-defines as an Algerian rabbi. Without official ordination (*Smicha*), he leads prayers at M-Switch and teaches Torah on the weekends in his local synagogue in northern Paris. In-house jokes at M-Switch

often center on North Africa and shared understandings of popular North African culture. However, as Laila would explain to me, within such shared understandings, and specifically between Jews and Muslims, Israel-Palestine is a taboo topic. Judaism and Islam are also off-limits as topics of discussion, at least in any meaningful way, an issue to which I will return.

Despite these unspoken taboos, M-Switch sits in an intermediate position: though it operates within a strongly secular French business terrain, religious identification there is not just accepted but encouraged as a sign that one has values and adheres to an ethical code. It is also a site where work can be convivial as well as collegial, and where interreligious commercial exchange, particularly between Jews and Muslims, is both applauded and promoted. That said, the verticality of M-Switch—"The second floor decides, the first floor executes," according to Moh—reflects a cogent architectural hierarchy of power. The importance of the technical center located on the second floor of the M-Switch building, where James could often be found at prayer in the mornings wearing his phylacteries (*tefillin*), is both symbolic and central to its political project. Guy compared the atmosphere that James engendered in the second-floor technical engine room to a "veritable North African synagogue," and Guy in particular extended this ambiance to the company as a whole. While James oversees M-Switch operations with erudition, business acumen, and engineering know-how, Guy has managed to entrench a culture of amicable intracompany and interreligious relations with his great wit and sharp comedic delivery.

Guy was involved in the commerce of grain as a teenager in Oran, and then worked in clothing and then in telecom. He is a *bon vivant*; he relies almost entirely on his capacity to strike up a rapport, charm people, and play the fool whether in French or Arabic, both socially and for business. It was clear that this was his role and that the technicalities of "the deal" were of only limit-

ed interest to him. Perhaps because of his unconstrained, expressive nature, even though he had a card stating that he was Directeur Commercial at M-Switch, Guy did not appear to other employees to be a *décisionnaire* (decision-maker), but rather as "one of us." Both Moh and Nedjib regarded the way in which Guy identifies with Algeria as authentic and convivial, and perhaps closer to the language and behavior of their parents or grandparents, which they would represent as *blédard*, a derogatory yet also affectionate term for first-generation Maghrebi. For example, Guy freely peppers his French with Darija or standard spoken Arabic words like *wesh*, *'adesh*, or *kifesh* (what, how much/what time, and how), creating a linguistic and class solidarity with Moh and Nedjib: speaking Darija in France is indexed to being lower class. Curiously, James, like Guy, also speaks Darija proficiently, thanks to his father, whose own grandfather came from a line of Tlemcen rabbis who spoke classical and local variants of Arabic and moved to a small Arabic-speaking city in central-western Algeria.[10] Nevertheless, the way that James Mlihi identifies with Algeria is filtered socially and materially through his position as rabbi-entrepreneur, while this is less evident with Guy. In fact, James did not live through his "memories" of North Africa, but instead received them from others who did. Through them, he melds an imagined past of his parents to his own present: "Yesterday's Algeria, hmm … for me it is not a geographic territory … it is an atmosphere [ambiance], it is a feeling, a lifestyle. When people talk to me about yesterday's Algerian Judaism, I feel a deep connection; when people talk to me about yesterday's Algeria and the problems between the French and the Arabs, I do not feel involved."

James harbors an extreme ambivalence toward the territory of Algeria. He is deeply attached to western Algerian practices of prayer and liturgical tone that he has inherited, and perhaps this is why he has tried so hard to maintain them in his synagogue. However, despite his best efforts,

James has become frustrated because the transmission of rites and rituals from western Algeria to the younger generations in Paris has not borne fruit, while his cousins have had considerable success in reviving specific Oranais practices in Netanya. On the other hand, James denies any involvement in the paradigmatic colonial tensions of French-Algeria even though he knows—on occasion we discussed it—that Jewish communities played a role in that history. The dissonance between the *ambiance* to which James seems to feel a connection, and "yesterday's Algeria," to which he acknowledges none, demonstrate the selective nature of his Maghrebi imaginary and its non-linear temporalities. This is not the nostalgic mourning for a past but rather an illusory, pre-tend Maghrebi world that lets James in. The relationship between James's distancing himself from Algeria's colonial political history and his strong connection to religious practice there seems highly tense. His move to disconnect liturgy and history lets him maintain a profound, al-most transcendental connection to western Algeria as an alternative, imagined Jerusalem without positioning himself in relation to struggles between settler-colonialism and autochthonous eman-cipation.

While James's personal project of Maghrebi religious revivalism as a self-proclaimed rabbi may have failed, in part due to the shifting demographics of northern Paris, he has succeeded in his professional endeavors. His vision for M-Switch has allowed colleagues there to blend a North African genealogy with a sense of collectivity. This has constructed and maintained a deep conviviality as a modus operandi for both workplace relations and ongoing commercial interac-tion with the Maghreb. Here we see how the Maghrebi imaginaries of James and Guy, as lan-guages of liturgical or dialectal cultural proximity to western Algeria, blend with the socio-mate-riality of Maghrebiness at M-Switch.

In our discussions, James termed the post-Falcon move toward working with North African operators[11] a "coincidence," and according to both Guy and James it was a matter of having been "in the right place at the right time." While good fortune may have played a part, the overriding importance of the Maghreb in the company's success cannot be underestimated. Here, envisioning Maghrebiness in France does not denote class- or race-based political solidarity between Jews and Muslims; rather it demonstrates the social conservatism inherent in the revival of traditionalism. The experience of marginality and the sense of being "Other" in France are shared, but at M-Switch their importance is empathetic rather than political. Thus Otherness at M-Switch is used as a catalyst for interreligious (Jewish-Muslim) communal diasporic projection of togetherness that combines individualistic ambition with collective minority solidarity for commercial gain. Because of this gain and the perception of self-advancement that it produces, Moh and Nedjib buy into this model, happy to consider their pronounced work ethic to be North African as opposed to French.

Along with their shared sense of being Othered, both James and Guy share a deep knowledge of local trading practices and cultures of commercial cooperation, knowledge implicit within their North African families through, respectively, Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic liturgy and grain brokering. Both are modes of employment long rooted in the Oran region. Such histories and their invocation call to mind the Geertz's story, "deliberately unprecedented by any explanatory comment," about the *mezrag* trading system in the Marmusha area of the Moroccan Atlas and the protagonist Cohen who must endlessly negotiate between colonial and local Berber structures and authorities (1973: 7–8). The stored-up commercial knowledge is based on a series of historical "winks," stories we are told and repeat in different times and places, and yet these same

winks create a powerful artifice for continued Jewish-Muslim commercial interdependence. What is more, they fit with the social backgrounds of employees like Moh and Nedjib: their parents were economic *émigrés* from Algeria seeking employment in the steelworks of the Massif Central. They recognize themselves in that artifice. By contrast, Laila is the daughter of a prominent aristocratic entrepreneur in Morocco, a connection that furthers James's commercial project and brings the company cultural-political respectability.

The commercial cool of Maghrebi conviviality that James seeks to create includes people's enjoyment in working together and therefore in investing themselves more fully in their work, which in turn develops stronger interpersonal relationships. Guy explained, "It's the idea that 'If I work hard for you, you work hard for me.'" These feelings of workplace solidarity, heightened by minority difference, recalibrate the values inculcated at French engineering school, something the entire workforce at M-Switch recognizes. As James put it, minority sensibility as an Algerian descendant born in France gives one insight into "how diasporas function." The importance of North Africa thus transits through James's imagination which, he acknowledges, relates to his parents' enforced and emotionally complicated "period of adaptation to French society." This is something else that Moh and Nedjib can identify with. Yet, James seems to blur his parents' experience with his own life trajectory, particularly regarding his relationship to Algerian Jewish life.

Operationalizing *Ambiance Diaspora*: Algerian Home and Convivial Host Spaces

The North African *mise en scène* of M-Switch's *ambiance diaspora* is exemplified by a rallying point of consensus: the company-wide assumption that minorities understand one another. This, in turn, produces the will to work more productively together. Guy carefully nurtured this senti-

ment, using it to maintain inclusivity and ensuring its circulation throughout the company. Laila told me that staff greatly enjoyed the jovial ambiance of M-Switch. For example, there is an on-going, in-company joke about the need for employees to partake in eating North African *sfinj*, a typical North African doughnut mixture that is deep-fried and caked in sugar eaten by North African Jews during Hanukkah.[12] "Could you bring us back some *sfinj*?" they would ask anyone leaving for Algeria or Morocco. The joke is that *sfinj* will not keep even for a few minutes, let alone for days sitting in luggage. The trope of *sfinj* at M-Switch exemplifies tensions around time and materiality: the consumption of *sfinj* relates to both a recent Jewish-Muslim shared past in the Maghreb and the timelessness of religious/cultural tradition. Because *sfinj* works so well as a discursive vector for commonality or, in management language, "team-building," James had invited a *sfinj*-maker to come to M-Switch just before the morning coffee-break. He felt compelled to call off the visit at the last minute when he heard the news that morning that Osama Bin Laden had been killed. As he put it, he had not wanted to be seen as celebrating his death.

Ambiance diaspora is the wider discursive structure into which *sfinj* fits at M-Switch. Although it is not made explicit, *ambiance diaspora* is the company's non-commercial goal, or its cultural-political side, one that is legible to both employees and clients. Guy described the operationalization of *ambiance diaspora* to me as "diasporic in the greater sense of the word." He spoke of a "celebration of difference" (*on fête nos différences*) and "origins" (*les origines*), which I took to mean a form of intercultural understanding born of relational practices—linguistic, culinary, and religious—that nurture a sentiment of partial communality. This is the very antithesis of what Schnapper states about North African Judaism in this article's epigraph. Guy is convinced that M-Switch, as a social space, has managed to combine a multitude of diasporic

perspectives and build positive, collaborative, social optimism into the workplace. Such dreams constitute James's personal-political project woven into the three-story premises of M-Switch, developed and facilitated by Guy in good faith, and validated by Laila (and later Nedjib) on business trips to North Africa when they present a Maghrebi Jewish-Muslim face to the commercial world outside. Moreover, *ambiance diaspora* serves as a safe haven for Maghrebi minorities, protecting their difference from the French majority on the outside. In contrast to the ambivalence James feels toward contemporary Algeria—"at the [Algiers] airport it's as if I have an Israeli flag stuck to my forehead, in spite of my not particularly Jewish name and my not particularly Jewish face,"—he has consciously sought to create a work-space unbeholden to a "life dominated by French," which is what his family was subjected to upon arrival from Algeria.

James freely admits that he was seeking a non-French atmosphere when he established M-Switch. Indeed, he considers himself to be an *émigré* in his overall approach to life in France, which ties him to a working-class narrative of toil and endeavor. Thus he feels that he works better with people born and raised in North Africa, like Laila. Still, he distinguishes this feeling of proximity from his relationship with French Muslims of Maghrebi descent.[13] James's desire to interact predominantly with what he sees as an authentic North African first generation has an ambiguous social basis: M-Switch has been established on an image of little help but much hard work and entrepreneurialism, but James's idealized North African, Maghrebi sociability is highly educated and transnational, and aspires to be bourgeois. This bourgeois sensibility taps into the links between globalized middle and upper classes that cooperate commercially and connect socially. These two sensibilities or social pathways sit together uncomfortably: James's elite sociability and interactions are in tension with his working-class roots. In creating this division, James

only partially includes a diasporic generation born in France, of which, ironically, he himself is a part.

Running counter to French political values, the social mobility that M-Switch enables is tightly linked to James's perspective that minorities should stick together. In this idealized social bond, strength is derived from the collective endeavor of the company, in opposition to the outside world, represented by *la France*. Laila felt that this was a strong sentiment around which workers at M-Switch coalesced. In order to promote this, M-Switch allowed employees time off for religious holidays. References to "hard work" and "ambition" were recurrent in interlocutors' testimonies describing M-Switch's company culture, conforming to an individualism somewhat at odds with the vision of inclusiveness and collective investment conjured up by *ambiance diaspora*. The differential prestige accorded to the diplomas of Laila and James and those of Moh and Nedjib no doubt carried with it differentiated social understandings of what an esprit de corps might look like, even alongside a recognition that money is of vital importance for a better life.

As a space of rapprochement, M-Switch poses a counter-narrative to a purported ongoing "conflict" between Muslims and Jews in France, but it is nonetheless infused with ambivalences and silences. The company has carefully curated spaces to host *ambiance diaspora*, which are at once clearly heartfelt and somewhat artificial. Thus, the voluntarist diaspora drive of M-Switch as a political project can also be seen as a frame for reproducing status, hierarchy, and control, at times of a racial or gendered nature and shot through with class inequalities. With Laila, a specific conversation on Israel-Palestine seemed to breach the invisible dividing line/limits of intra-

communal North African references and the egalitarian communality of *ambiance diaspora* that she held dear.

The Limits of M-Switch Solidarity and Conviviality: Israel-Palestine as a Flash-point

M-Switch recruited Laila from another ICT company in 2005. With her ability to bridge the technical and commercial worlds, commanding presence, and professional experience in male-dominated engineering centers (at engineering college and then in a satellite-technology start-up), she quickly became one of the few people with quasi-unfettered access to the "veritable North African Synagogue" on the second floor. For a non-Jew this was exceptional; apart from Guy, James's cousins, and a few local colleagues in the le Sentier tech industry, no other M-Switch employees could enter this privileged realm. That Laila was employed directly by James, and an unwavering faith they gained in one another once they began to work together, meant that she was close to the company's core decision-makers and technical deciders. Laila was integral to opening up commercial ties in northern and sub-Saharan Africa, while James gave her access and insight into the development of cutting-edge telecom technologies from Israel. They became closer still when she began to travel with James to conferences and contractual closure negotiations. Against the unwritten rule of silence around sentiments of religious belonging and political loyalties regarding the Near East, James and Laila had a degree of understanding concerning each other's religious anchorings, which overlapped in terms of tradition and geography (western Algeria and eastern Morocco).[14]

All of the employees I spoke with contributed to M-Switch's collective success as well as the *ambiance diaspora* initiative that it formulated, albeit to varying degrees. However, many of

them also distanced themselves politically from the company outside the workplace. While all the voices in the company were critical of *la France raciste*, many held different views toward M-Switch in their homes, during coffee breaks, or at the water cooler—contexts where the recorder was off. In particular, they expressed mixed feelings about the presence of Israeli technologies in the company. For Nedjib, this was borne out of a fear that the development of these technologies, or the power and money that they generate, might reinforce power asymmetries in Israel-Palestine. These taboo water cooler debates and conversations over coffee crystalized an antagonism toward the "Other" through the foil of Israeli technological competency. In my frank conversations with Moh, he took ethical exception to the "support for Israel" that the web of familial and technological contacts at M-Switch suggested. Laila was Casaoui (from Casablanca) by birth and told me that she had to ignore the values of her "own community" (I assumed that she meant in terms of an Islamic connection to Palestine) to be successful in her work life at M-Switch. She explained that she could not understand the argument, which James supported, for Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel.

Laila, therefore, inhabited a tense position between the politics of her personal life and her professional life. She engages with James's "non-French" Maghrebi collective endeavor to work in and through France but "not be ruled by the French," as he put it. Both she and Guy assert that the strength, unity, and solidarity of M-Switch come partly from shared understandings of being variously a migrant, a religious minority, and an "Other" with regard to *la France*—it engenders further proximity and conviviality through a shared work ethic. For all of the central players, the site of a locale like M-Switch holds special promise because of its palimpsestic structure and history overlaying former Jewish-Muslim relational networks within le Sentier's textiles industries.

Yet, in effect, Israel-Palestine represents a discursive site of foreclosure to such communality: the intractable debate acts as a glass ceiling, above which equality or freedom of political expression seem impossible. The underlying, latent, and often-imagined tension around the silence concerning Israel-Palestine erupted into open conflict in one symbolically violent incident, when Laila and James had a heated argument on a plane flight.

Laila recalls that she was reading a book about the wife of the prophet Mohamed.[15] James took a look at the book and told her that it was well known that Jews trained the Prophet Mohamed.[16] Laila felt offended, particularly by his tone and pretense of authority, so to counter what she perceived as his aggression and paternalism, she let James know what she thought regarding the legitimacy of the state of Israel, which in turn shocked him. This incident, merging faith and the politics of the Near East, had a profound effect on their working relationship, and soon after Laila began seeking employment elsewhere. She later returned to live in Morocco (and has since moved to Dubai where she is self-employed), and when I visited her in Casablanca in 2012, she told me that her personal relationship with James had improved after the incident. She explained that somehow in testing and in fact overstepping the boundaries, or unwritten rules, set at M-Switch, they found a more honest space within which to relate. Both take visible pride in their friendship and today still work to maintain it. They speak on the phone regularly, particularly to discuss the market and technological developments, but they also share family news, and Laila visits James when she returns to Paris to see her sister. Today, they both claim to enjoy more mutual respect in each other's company. Laila did not always feel this mutual respect existed between them at M-Switch, despite their undiluted faith in one another when it came to

commercial ventures and the technical workplace, not to mention their shared cultural understandings of humor, food, and religious tradition.

At M-Switch, James and Laila recognized one another as cultural kin, yet their relationship eventually collided on a political level. Their cultural proximity emerged through a shared minority status and a communal sentiment of alterity at the stigmatizing evocation of North Africa in France. Moreover, this proximity transcended their difference vis-à-vis one another. The degree of their enmity would perhaps be less sharp—it at times resembles sibling rivalry—did they not so profoundly identify with one another. Their altercation and the reified community positions performed in the airplane can be viewed as a limit to the M-Switch project. These positions are derived from seemingly ever-more-firmly anchored global ethno-religious Jewish and Muslim subjectivities, often associated with support for Israel or Palestine. Yet the dispute did not end their relationship and it may even have strengthened their friendship.

Conclusions

The political project that appears to guide M-Switch blends non-linear temporalities that draw on elements of the past and the present, through language, cuisine, and a particular ambiance that revives a form of Maghrebiness. In so doing, it constructs an asymmetrical, cross-generational Jewish-Muslim conviviality that produces hope yet has limited reach. Influenced by his present-day "position vis-à-vis Algerians," James Mlihi is unable to situate himself in relation to the social and moral code imposed by France in Algeria. Self-defined as an Algerian rabbi-entrepreneur, he has deployed a model into which diverse people are willing to invest themselves. James's words and my analysis of them thus provide fresh material with which to understand the contested notion of Algerian Jewishness, especially given the longstanding idea that Algerian

Jews were more Gallicized than were Arabic-speaking Moroccan and Tunisian Jews (Ayoun and Cohen 1982; Chouraqui 1985). At M-Switch, James Mlihi embraces his Algerian Jewishness and stakes a claim in imagining collective Maghrebi space in Paris.

That space at M-Switch illuminates the continuation in le Sentier of the cooperation that defined much commercial culture in the Maghreb. It also demonstrates the experiential difficulty of creating a complex, entangled Maghrebi Jewish-Muslim forum, which is not always reducible to established binaries, be they ethnic (European or Arab), national (Israel or Palestine), or civilizational (Judeo-Christian or Islamic). M-Switch, as a site of reimagined communal Maghrebiness, is a space within which a future together is envisioned, often through ingenious, economically dependent ways. While such imaginaries are quite specific, they are not monolithic, nor do they lack in sensitivity. While the stories of conviviality and shared imaginaries at M-Switch are often contradictory, they show that, for those for whom Maghrebi liturgies and histories are meaningful, such a culture can be translated into relational practice.

The story of M-Switch serves as a counterpoint to the claims of French public intellectuals that they alone represent the sentiments of North African Jews and their descendants in Paris. While there are obvious religious differences between Jews and Muslims, perspectives that insist that Sephardic Jewishness and North African Arabness are mutually exclusive (Bensoussan 2012; Trigano 2009) obscure contacts and interactions between North African Jews and Muslims, as well as similarities across their experiences immigrating to France. Further, the M-Switch case calls into question the assumptions exemplified by Dominique Schnapper's epigraph that prefaces this article. She seems to criticize North African Jews for being unable to synthesize the "Arab" part of themselves with the "French" and "Jewish" parts. However, her representation

of French North African Jews appears to be beholden to her own exoticizing and class-based readings of "Maghrebi Jews," that they are incapable of self-reflection and intercultural communication due to a purported fixed, traditionalist frame of reference. Yet "North African Judaism," like other traditions, reinvents itself in interaction with the multiple constituent histories Schnapper herself enumerates.

Interactions and relations at M-Switch are pregnant with Maghrebi references. These have been operationalized through *ambiance diaspora*, signaling perhaps the possibility that neoliberal forms of subjectivity might allow space for commercialized minority communities of contact. This possibility is complicated by the individual-collective tensions at play in company dynamics. Though Maghrebi references at M-Switch are very specific to the space and time in which people are together there, they relay a feeling of belonging centered on shared understandings that are oppositional to Frenchness. These connect individual aspirations with a work ethic felt to be different and more rigorous than those on the outside, in Paris. These practices of Maghrebiness at M-Switch sketch out the shaky contours of contemporary Jewish and Muslim identification in Paris, which are fraught and contradictory but hold wider lessons for how people coalesce in the face of political injustices that exclude them on the basis of their difference and especially their religion. At both spatial and discursive levels, M-Switch brings together minority sensibilities and contemporary North African economic realities in the telecoms industry in both France and Algeria. And yet, at times, such a situation, driven by James's imaginings of Maghrebi civilization and authenticity, can reinforce class asymmetries not so different from those of the colonial era, or regenerate them through contemporary French diasporic relations. Despite all of its contradictions, ambiguities, and incompleteness, the M-Switch project is held together by an

ambiance diaspora that facilitates a degree of honest communication that transcends a Manichaean, conflict-based relationality.

References

Allouche-Benayoun, Joëlle and Doris Bensimon. 1999. *Juifs d'Algérie: Mémoires et identités plurielles*. Paris: Stavi.

Amselle, Jean-Loup. 2011. *L'Ethnisication de la France*. Paris: Nouvelles Editions Lignes.

Arkin, Kimberly A. 2009. Rhinestone Aesthetics and Religious Essence: Looking Jewish in Paris. *American Ethnologist* 36, 4: 722–34.

Arkin, Kimberly A. 2014. *Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic: Fashioning Jewishness in France*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ayoun, Richard and Bernard Cohen. 1982. *Les Juifs d'Algérie: 2000 Ans D'histoire*. Judaïques. Paris: J. C. Lattès.

Bahloul, Joëlle. 1992. *La maison de la mémoire: ethnologie d'une demeure judéo-arabe*. Paris: Métaillés.

Barontini, Alexandrine. 2013. *Locuteurs de L'arabe Maghrébin-Langue de France: Une Analyse Sociolinguistique Des Représentations, Des Pratiques Langagières et Du Processus de Transmission*. Paris: INALCO.

Bensimon, Doris. 1989. *Les Juifs de France et leur relations avec Israël, 1945–1988*. Paris: L'-Harmattan.

Bensoussan, Georges. 2012. *Juifs En Pays Arabes: Le Grand Déracinement 1850–1975*. Paris: Editions Tallandier.

Benveniste, Annie. 2002. *Figures Politiques de l'Identité Juive à Sarcelles*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Boum, Aomar. 2014. *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Boyarin, Jonathan. 1991. *Polish Jews in Paris: The Ethnography of Memory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Chauvel, Genevieve. 2009. *Aicha, La Bien-Aimée Du Prophète*. Paris: Librairie générale française.

Chouraqui, André. 1985. *Histoire Des Juifs En Afrique Du Nord*. Paris: Hachette littérature.

Cohen, Erik and Maurice Ifergan. 2007. *Heureux comme juifs en France? Étude sociologique*. Jérusalem: Éditions Elkana et Akadem.

Danan, Ariel. 2014. *Les Juifs de France et l'état d'Israël.* Paris: Honoré Champion.

Endelstein, Lucine. 2006. Religion, transformation des quartiers populaires et recomposition des identités diasporiques: Le renouveau du judaïsme orthodoxe à Paris. *Espace populations sociétés. Space Populations Societies* 1 (Apr.): 83–94.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York City: Basic Books.

Gilroy, Paul. 2004. *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* London: Routledge.

Goldberg, Harvey. 1989. Family and Community in Sephardic North Africa. In D. Kraemer, ed., *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 133–51.

Gottreich, Emily. 2007. *The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco's Red City*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Green, Nancy L. 1997. *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Jikeli, Günther. 2015. *European Muslim Antisemitism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Katz, Ethan B. 2015. *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lasch, Franck, Frédéric Le Roy, and Saïd Yami. 2007. Critical Growth Factors of ICT Start-Ups. *Management Decision* 45, 1: 62–75.

Levy, André. 2015. *Return to Casablanca*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lewis, Bernard. 2014. *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mack, Mehammed Amadeus. 2017. *Sexagon: Muslims, France, and the Sexualization of National Culture*. New York: Modern Language Initiative.

Mandel, Maud. 2014. *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marglin, Jessica M. 2014. Mediterranean Modernity through Jewish Eyes: The Trans-Imperial Life of Abraham Ankawa. *Jewish Social Studies* 20, 2: 34–68.

Memmi, Albert. 1957. *Portrait du colonisé; précédé du Portrait du colonisateur: essai*. Paris: Corrêa.

Miské, Karim. 2013. *Juifs et Musulmans si loin, si proches*. Karim Miské, director. Documentaire Arte.

Podselver, Laurence. 2004. Le Judaïsme français contemporain: données socio-historiques. In L. Podselver, ed., *Fragmentation et recomposition du judaïsme: le cas français : suivi d'une discussion avec Jörg Stolz*. Genève: Labor et fides.

Saada, Emmanuelle. 1993. Les territoires de l'identité. Être juif à Arbreville. *Genèses: Sciences sociales et histoire* 11: 111–36.

Saada, Emmanuelle. 2002. Race and Sociological Reason in the Republic Inquiries on the Métis in the French Empire (1908–37). *International Sociology* 17, 3: 361–91.

Sayad, Abdelmalek. 2006. *L'immigration ou Les paradoxes de l'altérité. 2, Les enfants illég-times*. Paris: Raisons d'agir éditions.

Schnapper, Dominique. 2011. Vivre ensemble avec Dominique Schnapper. *Hors-champs* 10–11. French Culture (radio), Paris, 23 June.

Schreier, Joshua. 2010. *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria*. New York: Rutgers University Press.

Shepard, Todd. 2017. *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962–1979*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Slyomovics, Susan. 2000. Geographies of Jewish Tlemcen. *Journal of North African Studies* 5, 4: 81–96.

Spiegel, Avi Marx. 2015. *Young Islam: The New Politics of Religion in Morocco and the Arab World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Strauss, Claudia. 2006. The Imaginary. *Anthropological Theory* 6, 3: 322–44.

Tapia, Claude. 2010. L'immigration des Juifs maghrébins en France: Modalités d'intégration: modalités et ruptures." In Colette Zytnicki, ed., *Terre d'exile, terre d'asile*. Paris: Editions de l'Eclat.

Timsit, Daniel. 1998. *Algerie: récit anachronique*. Saint-Denis: Bouchène.

Trigano, Shmuel, ed. 2009. *La fin du judaïsme en terre d'islam*. Vol. 1. Médiations. Paris: De-noël.

Wasserstrom, Steven M. 2014. *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Abstract: This article is an investigation of ethno-commercial exchanges and interactions between Jews and Muslims of North African heritage that takes account of their cross-cultural antecedents and continuities. The ethnographic focus is a telecommunications company called M-Switch located in the Parisian neighborhood of le Sentier, the trajectory of which is part of a broader cultural and economic shift observable in the neighborhood from industry to new technologies. This particular company is a privileged site for witnessing how people work with and across religious differences between Maghrebi Jews and Muslims in France. The ethnography looks at how contemporary, non-nostalgic reconceptualizations of the past are utilized to negotiate an ethnically plural and potentially convivial present. Relationships within the company have a Maghrebi center made up of shared cultural memories, economic interdependency, and changing gender and class relations. More specifically, relationships between Jews and Muslims at M-Switch are often defined by a desire to re-appropriate and adapt a Maghrebi world of intercommunal empathy. This project is complicated by French and geopolitical representations of ethno-religious conflict.

Key words: conviviality; ethno-commerce, ethnography, intergenerational change, North Africa, Maghreb, Muslims and Jews, Paris

Acknowledgments: It goes without saying that I owe many of the insights and reflections in this article to friends and colleagues within the telecoms industry in Paris. My ethnographic doctoral research would not have been possible without the support of a Leverhulme Trust studentship abroad award. This paper started life while I was writing up my doctoral research and has taken a long time to refine. It has benefited at various stages from the generous insights of some wonderfully gifted colleagues. For help while I was producing its doctoral form, and immediately thereafter, many thanks go to Gil Anidjar, Muriam Haleh Davis, Laleh Khalili, James McDougall, and Parvathi Ramen. Their constructive criticism enabled me to think about the most interesting aspects of the ethnography. Later on, after I had presented this material post-doctorally in Paris (EHESS) and Cambridge (Woolf Institute and Faculty of Divinity), I benefitted from comments and encouragement from Sarah Abrevaya Stein, Kimberly Arkin, Ben Gidley, Nilüfer Göle, Ethan Katz, Julienne Obadia, and Miriam Wagner, who pushed me to think through the piece's broader implications. More recently, in my role as Research Associate on a Mellon Foundation funded project at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge, I held a Visiting Research Fellowship at Université de Strasbourg (Unistra, June-August 2019) thanks to an iPOPs award from the Institut National D'études Démographiques (INED). During this time, I strengthened the piece as a result of the detailed comments and suggestions of *CSSH*'s anonymous readers. Finally, I am very grateful to David Akin, Managing Editor of *CSSH*, whose close attention to my meaning and expression has made this piece much more pleasurable to read. A thousand thanks to you all.

[2] While I acknowledge that these words are potentially reifying, I apply them only to people who define themselves by using them or their various French slang equivalences: *feuj*, *jeuf*, *re-beu*, *mus*, *muslim*.

[3] For contemporary Jewish-Muslim relations in Morocco, see Levy 2015; and for the imagined Jewish-Muslim past in the Moroccan Muslim present, see Boum 2014.

[4] I draw here on Claudia Strauss' discussion of the social imaginary and her key insight that it is primarily "person-centered" (2006: 326).

[5] I have taken anthropological inspiration from Jonathan Boyarin's late 1980s investigation of Jewish specificities and collective attachments among Polish Jews and their position in the more Mediterranean Jewish community of the 1980s (1991). My work combines a sensitive, insider "anthropology of the tribe" approach with questions about Maghrebi immigration to France (Sayad 2006). I have also drawn on marginal reflexive French ethnographies from the 1990s and 2000s relating to race, class, and colonial history (Benveniste 2002; Saada 1993, 2002), alongside studies of the growth in Jewish Orthodoxies in France (Podselver 2004; Endelstein 2006). Darija is the North African Arabic of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. It includes certain French terms and is predicated on Berber syntactical structures. Darija is the linguistic reality of most people dwelling in the Maghreb even though it continues to be considered a dialect (see Barontini 2013).

[6] I initially gained access to sites such as M-Switch via networks of friends and former colleagues in the telecommunications industry who taught me about "voice" or "air" time, a commodity that consists of the emission and reception of two-way voice "traffic" (telephonic communication) that is channeled through time and space—now known as "switch" technology—mostly via the internet (Voice-Over Internet Protocol, or VOIP, satellite or physical cabling). The services that telecoms-based ICT companies produce, sell, or manage include billing voice traffic, managing billing and quality systems for voice-traffic delivery, systems to enable voice recording, and telecom security systems.

[7] Michaël Boukobza at Iliad group was the most notable "success story" example of this during my time working in the telecoms industry.

[8] For more regarding an ongoing Maghrebi political solidarity, and for different political perspectives, see the work of Albert Memmi on Tunisia (1957), and Daniel Timsit on Algeria (1998).

[9] Observance is difficult to qualify. For example, Guy would "observe" major Jewish holidays, just as Laila would major Muslim ones, but neither ate particularly kosher or halal. Moh and James were more noticeably "practicing" since they took breaks for prayer and to observe the *jumu'ah* (Friday).

[10] For more on this rabbinic genealogy, see Slyomovics 2000.

[11] North African telecom operators have been termed Post, Telecom, and Telegram operators (PTTs). Some years ago, they were the national operators of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia: Algérie télécom, Maroc télécom (*itisaalat*), and Tunisie Télécom.

[12] *Sfinj* (sing. *sfinja*) is a Maghrebi staple sweet sold in market stalls across North Africa and in the working-class markets of urban France. In Israel it is known as *sufganiyah*.

[13] See Shepard on the neocolonial fear of the Arab male body in France (2017), and Mack regarding the Orientalization/sexualization of the Arab body (2017).

[14] This overlap can be taken further both socially and ritually. The traditions that both James and Laila champion converge in other ways: James adheres to the Enkaoua Rabbinim of the Tlemcen rabbinic line, and Laila to the Tariqat Boutichichiya Sufi order whose yearly pilgrimage occurs in the nearby Moroccan border town of Oujda. Both religious orders are politically conservative, even as they eschew politics per se, and both are embedded in precolonial practice but accept the rule of the day, one the *Makhzan* (the vernacular term for the Moroccan powers that be), the other French imperialism (Spiegel 2015: 39; Marglin 2014: 39).

[15] *Aïsha la bien aimée du Prophète* (Chauvel 2009).

[16] At the birth of Islam, the Prophet interacted with the Jewish tribes of Medina both in tandem and in conflict (Miské 2013; Lewis 2014; Wasserstrom 2014).